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ABSTRACT

For a long time educational administration has been enamored with the idea that studies about leadership should lead to contextually free generalizations. Despite decades of empirical studies modeled after the social sciences' most rigorous disciplines, very little is known about leadership. Previous views of leadership attempted to generalize across specific contexts to arrive at rules by which the researcher could describe, predict, and control the phenomena under study. This paper takes the position that in the area of leadership, the attempt has been a failure. The leadership theory of Howard Gardner (1995) asserts that understanding of the function of leaders and their cognitive processes begins by understanding their mental images. Mental images are language-based and culturally encapsulated. The paper examines the importance of leadership by looking at acknowledged leaders and the biographies of those they admired or read about in school. By starting with leaders and moving backwards, it may be possible to discern what qualities of those other leaders inspired them. The paper challenges the radical dualism of the traditional mindset in educational administration, which believes the discipline will collapse if it is contextualized as simply a matter of language and culture. Educational theorists would then have to abandon claims to an illusory objectivity that never existed and examine leadership solely within cultural and linguistic borders. (Contains 44 references.) (LMI)

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Redefining Leadership as Meaning in Context

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For a very long time educational administration has been enamored with the idea that studies about leadership should lead to contextually free generalizations (Willower,1994, p.3). A chronological review of the field by Murphy (1993) indicates that while the establishment of departments of educational administration began in earnest around 1900-1930, the models were drawn from industry with emphasis on fact gathering and empirical generalizations (p.4). Clearly the idea was to prepare leaders who could function in a variety of situations with concepts that would be good for nearly all of them. This thrust produced a movement which looked to the rigor of the social sciences for better theoretical and conceptual material than craft based knowledge (Murphy, 1992, p. 56). But the purpose was the same, i.e., to prepare a "scientifically trained" school administrator that would be considered on the same plane as practitioners in other fields. The "promised land" was nothing less than the "full professionalization of school administration" (Farquhar, 1977; Culbertson, 1988, pp. 7, 17)).

The results were disappointing (Immegart, 1988, pp.259-277). Despite decades of empirical studies modeled after the social sciences most rigorous disciplines, very little is known about leadership (Foster, 1986, pp.169-188; Greenfield and Ribbons,1993, p.68) while the principles of management

have produced countless books, tracts, papers and speculative theories (Stout, 1989, pp.390-402).

A relatively recent critique on the topic of leadership from Howard Gardner (1995) offers some insight to the problem. Gardner recounts the various perspectives about leadership and indicates why he believes that "the otherwise ample social-scientific literature on leadership" (p.16) is incomplete.

A theory of leadership as the acquisition of power is inadequate because it lacks any citation of the specific messages "that can direct and guide an inner circle and a wider polity" (p. 16). Educational administration has been highly influenced by ideas regarding power. The prestige accorded to Max Weber and forms of domination and bureaucracy have left a deep imprint on the field (Abbott and Caracheo, 1988). Bureaucratic theory has long been one of the important staples in educational administration (see Silver, 1983, pp.73-95; Haller and Strike, 1986, pp. 21-22; Hoy and Forsyth, 1986, pp.73-92; Owens, 1987, pp.127-8; Kimbrough and Nunnery, 1988, pp.261-5; Hanson, 1991, pp.63,89,361-2; Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1991, pp.121-3; Murphey, 1992, p. 126; Thom, 1993, p. 144) and its derivative, compliance theory (Hoy and Miskel (1982, pp. 37-38).

The second theory Gardner critiques is that of policy studies. Gardner posits that this view is inadequate because it "minimizes the role of a specific political leader," and

reduces decisions "to some kind of rational calculus" (p. 16).

Policy studies have become so centered in educational administration that departments of educational administration have been renamed to include the concept. Forty-two percent of the UCEA departments of educational administration have the word policy or policy studies in their titles. The literature of the field is also deep in the idea that decisions about political system theory are determinative of a leader's success (Immegart and Boyd, 1979, p. 275; Guthrie and Reed, 1986, pp. 28-41; Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs and Thurston, 1987, pp. 56-7,204-2). Mitchell (1989) reviewed 28,000 ERIC entries on education policy from 1975-1981 and found that "there was little agreement on goals and few exemplary studies of theoretical perspectives" (p. 227). The promise of policy studies remains unfulfilled to shed much light on leadership(Greenfield and Ribbons, 1993, pp.46-7).

A third theory of leadership is to view it as a largely accidental process of satisfying an audience or masses of people who have begun to identify common needs. Leaders are those who by happenstance "deliver" on these needs. To a large extent the theory of climate as social press (Silver, 1983, pp.204-238) engages this concept. A leader is someone who can deliver or meet emerging social presses made up of individual behaviors. School climate has long been a mainstream curricular area in educational administration

which has been captured by this idea (see Hoy and Miskel, 1978, pp.185-215; Haller and Strike, 1986, pp. 181-2; Hoy and Forsyth, 1986, pp.196-235; Owens, 1987, pp.162-197; Hanson, 1991, pp. 191-211). Gardner rejects this aspect of studying leadership as incomplete because "it does not relieve the leader of the need to articulate a message clearly and convincingly" (p. 17).

A fourth theory of studying leaders is to engage in psychological reports and focus on the personality of the leader, his/her early life experiences and relationships to other individuals. Early on educational administration was infatuated with trait theory (Getzels, Lipham and Campbell, 1968, pp. 1-3) but soon moved on to abandon nearly all studies of psycho-social development as important in understanding leadership. Behavioral studies of leaders became the substitute (Foster, 1986, pp. 171-4; Rost, 1991, pp. 53-65). Lately, however, there has been increased interest in leadership studies that look towards personality and early life experiences as important considerations in understanding leaders, James MacGregor Burns (1978) Leadership and James Barber's (1985) The Presidential Character.

Gardner's criticism of these theories to understanding leadership posits that while important to understanding a person's world view, "the personality emphasis cannot explain the particular course called for by a leader and the degree of success achieved" (p. 17).

Gardner's "cognitive" approach is centered on the human mind (p. 15) Gardner is concerned about the thoughts, ideas, and mental images are developed, combined, remembered and accessed in human mental life. These form the basis of the leader's incomparable act: telling stories. Through storytelling leaders manipulate symbols and compete for followers (p. 9).

The importance of Gardner's theory is underscored by John Lukac's (1990) compelling chronicle of the eighty day struggle between Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill called The Duel. In his account, Lukacs wrote:

> What matters is the mental..character of a man. Hitler and Churchill were powerful thinkers. Everything depended on how and what they really thought, including the principal element of their duel: how their minds perceived and projected each other....What matters in this world is what people....think and believe; but their beliefs, ideas and thoughts exist no more independently of them than they themselves exist independently of the rest of the world. Ideas matter only when men incarnate them. (p.9).

It ought to be clear that the mental images leaders carry in their heads are indeed products of their cultures, languages and peculiar time/space linkages. In the words of Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, "The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture" (p.22). These mental images and ideas, so powerful in the construction of story development and any audience's capability of understanding and resonating to them, are context dependent

rather than context free. A search for truth is therefore ontologically contained within a language and a culture and may not be transferable from that context(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.203) Meaning is therefore relative as is truth. The search for context free generalizations is not only futile but illusory.

Testimony to the futility of context free generalizations is offered by historian John Keegan (1987) who notes that the leading Western military academies were founded on the idea that preparing military leaders could be done by studying generalship as a culturally free phenomenon. But that was a mistake says Keegan because, "the generalship of one age and place may not all resemble that of another." Keegan criticizes the social scientists who want to make "universal and general what is stubbornly local and particular" (p.1) Keegan insists that even theorists like Clausewitz and Marx are not timeless. "Rarely is either subject to the rigour of contextualization. Yet context, when theories as powerful as theirs are at stake, is all" (p.3). Keegan explains that Clausewitz and Marx "must therefore be seen as products of their time and place" (p.4).

Let me summarize to this point. Previous views of leadership were attempts to generalize across specific contexts, to arrive at rules by which the researcher could describe, predict and control the phenomena he/she was studying. At least in the area of leadership, the attempt

has been a dismal failure. Only that which is trivial may be generalizable, and in the case of behaviors which stand forth across contexts appear to be much like the more primitive studies regarding traits, or as they are currently called,"habits" (Covey, 1991).

Howard Gardner's leadership theory is that one can begin to understand the function of leaders and their cognitive processes by understanding their mental images. Mental images are language based and culturally encapsulated. They are socio-linguistic constructs.

Redefining Leadership Within Context

Does the lack of generalizability about leadership jeopardize the study of it in programs of educational administration? Does presenting a contextually defined model diminish its importance?

To access these questions I have chosen to examine the importance of leadership from acknowledged leaders and biographical commentary regarding those they admired or read about in school. The rationale is rather straightforward. The purpose of formal studies is to prepare leaders. By starting with leaders and moving backwards, it may be possible to discern what about other leaders that inspired them. It may be possible to learn something about leaders and leadership studies from these snapshots.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) first published On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History in 1841. He also published a history of the French Revolution. Both books were read by two world renowned leaders who were highly influenced by Carlyle's writing. The first was the young Winston Churchill (Gilbert, 1991, p. 32). Carlyle's picture of Oliver Cromwell was later used in a speech before Parliament (p. 833). The second world leader was Mohandas Gandhi (Ayer,1973, p.136). Churchill was born while Carlyle was still alive. He was seven when Carlyle died. Gandhi was twelve. Gandhi read Carlyle's essay on the prophet Mohammed when he was in England in 1888 (Fischer,1950, p.37).

Churchill seems to have used Carlyle's thoughts well within English literary and historical traditions, i.e., entirely within his cultural context. Gandhi, however, had a more difficult task. It is interesting to note what Gandhi extrapolated from Carlyle. It was certainly not isomorphic, i.e., applying certain rules or even points about specific lives from Carlyle to India, nor Carlyle's aphorisms and commentary about human life which fill his essays.

Gandhi took from Carlyle these ideas: (1) from the French Revolution that violence could not succeed in the long run (Ayer, 1973, p. 136); and (2) man's future was not mechanistically nor deterministically set, but open. From his own culture's great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata Gandhi took the concept that heroism and the heroic outlook were what was important. It was the idea of

honor through action and the translation of that notion with satyagrahi "with a profound belief in the moral power and heroic response of the masses" that was uniquely Gandhian and Indian (p.135). What Gandhi deduced from Carlyle was both perceived from the Indian point of view and set within contemporary Indian culture, context and events.

What is remarkable about studying leadership in context is that it re-centers the concept that leaders do matter. This perspective re-establishes the importance for recognizing greatness (Carlyle's principle theme) and rejects views that if there are leaders they are simply products of their organizations or political movements (a deterministic/mechanistic view).

When summed across contexts, leadership as a human phenomenon presented from social science theories dominant in educational administration, has been reduced to explanations of the ebb and flow of rules, cycles, axioms or clashes between vested and impersonal socio-cultural forces. Current theories which stretch across contexts diminish and dehumanize leadership. They limit choice among leaders and eliminate socio-cultural idiosyncracies which are most likely the derivative agents of a leader's success.

Early studies of leaders in the Western tradition beginning with Plutarch emphasized personal virtues (Whittemore, 1988, pp.11-33 in context and time. Because they presented the reader with the choices present to a leader, the relationship between judgment, virtue and

success were clear. As such they have served as inspirational sources for future leaders for many centuries.

Harry Truman read Plutarch as a boy (McCullough,1992, p.43) and reread them as President, convinced that men make history and are not shaped by impersonal forces. (p. 463). Young George Patton's Aunt Nannie read to him Plutarch's Lives and imbued in him ideas that connected heroism to actions (D'Este, 1995, p. 39) much as Gandhi had been similarly persuaded. This observation presents a compelling case for learning about leadership within context because it re-centers the belief that humans can change their conditions. The social sciences have dwarfed this concept by rejecting the stubbornly peculiar aspects of the nature of leadership. In so doing they have obliterated the idea of heroic action as a possibility for changing schools (Anderson and Page, 1995, p.126).

The Postmodern Turn

Postmodernism negates modernism's notion of objectivity and rejects the basis for context free generalizations that presuppose the a priori view of an emergent structure or the present of patterns which shape analyses. Foucault (1972) stresses the idea of disconnecting "the unquestioned continuities by which we organize, in advance, the discourse that we are to analyze" (p.25). Postmodernism looks for the reasons why one can't generalize or find themes across

"timeless" contexts. Instead postmodernism searches for the ruptures, differences and dissimilarities as places where understanding begins. Without searching for the junctures one never understands the transformation of ideas (Foucault, 1972, pp.5).

Foucault (1965) provides a powerful illustration in his study of madness. The history of confinement suggested it was a place for those who could not work, i.e., an antidote and a punishment for idleness which was considered a primary and causative evil. Also, the lazar house, a place where those afflicted with leprosy were stationed contained thousands of lepers which were gradually cleared out in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the place of lepers, European societies put the poor and madmen. The insane could not work so their inclusion appeared to be proper. In this transformation the asylum was born (p. 57). In the mind of the period, social uselessness included lepers, beggars, other social dregs and the insane. The moral regimen required all of them to work as long and as hard as the situation permitted (p.60). The insane came to be viewed as animals that needed to be broken, disciplined and punished if necessary (pp.73-7). Madness was perceived to be animalism fueled by a descend into passion. Passion was defined as a kind of temporary madness leading to the phrase, "madly, passionately in love" (p.89). Madness then was viewed as unreason personified. The Latin word for madness is delirium "derived from lira, a furrow; so that

deliro actually means to move out of the furrow, away from the proper path of reason" (p.100).

Through powerful passages such as these Foucault shows time and again that in tracing the transformations of thoughts and mental images, pre-ordered arrangements obliterate the capacity to understand how things emerged and block the linkages between metaphors, history and practice.

One of the most serious threats to the concept of a field of practice resting on firm theoretical premises is that of a knowledge base. A knowledge base provides a form of legitimacy. The issue of legitimacy is of great concern to an academic discipline trying to survive in the market place of competing ideas and resources in the modern university. Educational administration has been an applied discipline desperately striving to secure legitimacy (Foster, 1992, p.1). It has been transfixed by the promise of rationalistic science as the genesis of that legitimacy. Questioning the basis of the rationalism evokes non-rational respostes.

The knowledge base rests on the concept of foundational knowledge. Such knowledge is said to be empirically verifiable or as it known today as "research based." And foundational knowledge is context free, i.e., generalizable which is why it is considered foundational.

When the postmodernist suggests that knowledge is contextually specific, it is postured that this view is either "anti-rational" or "anti-foundational." This is a clever word game. Foundational, rational, and generalizable

are embedded concepts in the same sub-set, one correlates and defines the other. To suggest that there is a contrary condition brings the oppositional charge that the proposition is "anti" foundational, rational, objective or "scientific."

The horror confronting the traditionalist in educational administration is that a future without the sanctity of the knowledge base as the rock of legitimacy is unthinkable. What the defenders miss is that they have a bad case of radical dualism. On the one side is what Holquist (1996) calls "timeless laws and selfless truths; on the other, is the social world of culture, with its ineluctable contingency, its ramifying particularity, its dictates that change with time"(p.54). The radical dualism of the traditional mindset in educational administration believes that the discipline will collapse if it is contextualized as simply a matter of language and culture. What then would we teach? What would the nature of research come to be?

It seems to me that we would have to abandon claims to an illusory objectivity that never did exist. We would have to examine leadership solely within cultural and linguistic borders and become extremely reluctant to transgress them for explanations.

Finally it means we abandon the dualism that has begun to pervade the theoretical base. As part of that we dispense with the bi-polarization of our mental field and reorganize ourselves to ontologically centered discourse that is

neither timeless nor generalizable beyond its borders. Not only is this posture more realistic and humane, it may work to replace impersonal forces with real people who may at times, act heroically, i.e., as leaders.

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